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A Letter to Most Darling Steph

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A LETTER TO MOST DARLING STEPH

MADISON GRAY

Dearest and Most Darling Steph:

You must be highly amused by my multiple efforts to draft a “Tribute to Professor Aleong” for an issue of the *Nova Law Review* to be dedicated in your honor.

Do the well-meaning editors realize that the friends you gathered close tended to be rather . . . eccentric? Do they realize that an eccentric will offer thoughts completely out of proportion from those that a colleague might? I suspect that my piece might be politely declined out of a discomfort for the edge of grief underlying every word. I suspect that the editors of the law review might be more comfortable if I could write safe sentences about finding closure regarding your absence.

It has been 508 days since your death. But enough about you . . .¹

How does one write a tribute anyway? Tribute is defined as “a gift, testimonial, compliment, or the like, given as due or in acknowledgment of gratitude or esteem” with synonyms such as “recognition, commendation, eulogy.”²

Do words exist that could express how loving and brilliant and sparkly and filled with laughter you will always be to those lucky enough to be in your inner circle?

Here’s what I find unseemly about this tribute piece. It’s so very . . . posthumous.

Not my authorship obviously, but your place as the individual worthy of honor. I celebrated you on a daily basis for the sixteen years that you were my friend. I fear that most of our readers missed out. Those who knew you surely do not need my awkward attempts to articulate how fabulous you were.

1. Should I let our readers in on the fact that “But enough about you . . .” was one of your standard lines?

2. *Tribute*, DICTIONARY.COM, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/tribute> (last visited Sept. 9, 2010).

The thing that I admired the most about you was your capacity to live with an open heart. The focus of your attention was on finding the joy in life—a pixie sprite sprinkling glitter and giggles as she danced by.

As a result, the quality of your life—and the lives of those around you—was illuminated. Is there a higher testimonial to offer on behalf of someone? This is my simple truth to offer up for posterity's sake about Professor Aleong: She illuminated her little corner of the world.

You were buried on a Sunday, and I spent my flight back to Nashville that night paralyzed with grief. While driving to work the next morning, the radio played Bob Marley's *Three Little Birds*!³ It had to be a message from you, yes?

How many times did we sing that song? I remember your little jazz-hands motion while you mouthed the lyrics to me behind the back of a tragically dull fellow at a disastrously dull cocktail party during law school; we laughed ourselves into asthma attacks on the way home that night. I remember holding hands in the backseat of the car and singing it to one another under our breath on the way to your bridal shower; your mother and grandmother were in the front seat.

I need to believe that the song the morning after your burial was a message from you.

For the consideration of our readers, I offer its lyrics to close this piece. If they choose to believe that the spirit of the song is a message from you then I am happy to share your message with them.

With unyielding love, Your Sabu⁴

“Don’t worry about a thing,
'Cause every little thing gonna be all right.”
Singin’: “Don’t worry about a thing,
'Cause every little thing gonna be all right!”

Rise up this mornin',
Smiled with the risin' sun,
Three little birds
Pitch by my doorstep
Singin' sweet songs

3. BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS, *THREE LITTLE BIRDS* (Island Records 1977).

4. Also known as, Madison Gray. Steph called me Sabu. It was a thing.

Of melodies pure and true,
Sayin', "This is my message to you-ou-ou:"

Singin': "Don't worry about a thing,
'Cause every little thing gonna be all right."

Singin': "Don't worry about a thing,
'Cause every little thing gonna be all right!"⁵

5. BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS, *supra* note 3.